

# LEMON GROVE GENERAL PLAN

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October 22, 1996

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Lemon Grove Historical Society

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# INTRODUCTION

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## Purpose

A City with unique historic roots and small town atmosphere, Lemon Grove still exhibits community pride and spirit in this modern era. As the 21st Century approaches, opportunities for community advancement abound. The *Lemon Grove General Plan* charts the course for the 21st Century, while preserving the community's small town charm and spirit. Appreciating Lemon Grove's unique history is essential to understand the community's aspirations for the future.

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*"...the 'blueprint' for the City's future, with the overriding goal of achieving the community's vision."*

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The *General Plan* represents a comprehensive plan for the City, and establishes strategies to achieve community goals pertaining to development, circulation patterns, aesthetics, public safety, open space and other civic matters. The *General Plan* is often referred to as the "blueprint" for the City's future, with the overriding goal of achieving the community's vision. Elected officials and City staff, when considering community development proposals, infrastructure improvements and public service investments, will rely on the *General Plan* for guidance.

## Legislative Authority

Under state planning law, each city must adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the city (Government Code Section 65300). The plan must consist of a statement of development policies, and include seven mandatory elements and any optional element that the city chooses to adopt. The mandatory elements include land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise and safety. State planning law establishes minimal requirements for the content of the mandatory elements. The mandatory elements may be combined, and all of the elements (both mandatory and optional) must be integrated and consistent. Moreover, all of the elements have equal status.

The *Lemon Grove General Plan* meets the requirements of state planning law, and includes all the mandatory elements. Furthermore, the policies and plans within the elements are consistent throughout the *General Plan* and sometimes even overlap.



*Unknown lady in front of Lemon Grove General Store, circa 1905. Courtesy of Lemon Grove Historical Society.*

### Planning Context

For many decades Lemon Grove existed as a thriving unincorporated community governed by the County of San Diego. In 1977, the community voted to incorporate as a city and transfer governmental jurisdiction from the County to the local residents. One of the new City's first tasks was preparing a *General Plan* to guide local community development. The first *Lemon Grove General Plan* was adopted in 1980.

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*"As the 21st Century approaches, Lemon Grove faces new opportunities and challenges."*

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As the 21st Century approaches, Lemon Grove faces new opportunities and challenges. Since adoption of the 1980 *General Plan*, a trolley has been constructed through the community, redevelopment of the Broadway commercial district has occurred, and concerns about preserving the established neighborhoods have grown. Moreover, many of the residents and business owners alike desire urban amenities, such as sidewalks and cultural centers, yet cherish the small town atmosphere.

In 1994, the City Council recognized that the *General Plan* needed updating to address more recent trends and evolving community goals. The Council consequently initiated a program to evaluate the City's goals for the future and update the *General Plan*.

### Geographic Setting

The City of Lemon Grove is located in the southwest portion of San Diego County, which comprises the southwest corner of California (Figure I-1). San Diego County is located about 150 miles south of downtown Los Angeles, and immediately north of the United States-Mexico border. Lemon Grove is centrally located within the greater San Diego/Tijuana urban area, affording residents and businesses easy access to the population and employment centers.

Encompassing 3.75 square miles, the City boundaries are defined by the SR-94 freeway to the north, Sweetwater Road to the east, 69th Street and MacArthur Drive on the west, and various residential streets to the south (Figure I-2). The City of La Mesa lies just north of the City, across SR-94. To the east of the City is the unincorporated community of Spring Valley. Several City of San Diego communities (Encanto, Oak Park and Rolando) wrap around the western portion of the City. The SR-125 freeway is planned to extend along the City's eastern boundary.

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*"Early residents,  
charmed by ideal  
weather...claimed  
'Best Climate on  
Earth!'"*

---

Lemon Grove enjoys warm, mild weather characteristic of mediterranean climates. Summers are warm and dry, and winters are cooler with occasional rains. Cool ocean breezes enhance the temperate climate. Early residents, charmed by the ideal weather conditions, claimed that Lemon Grove has the "Best Climate on Earth," which still serves as the City's official motto.

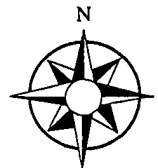
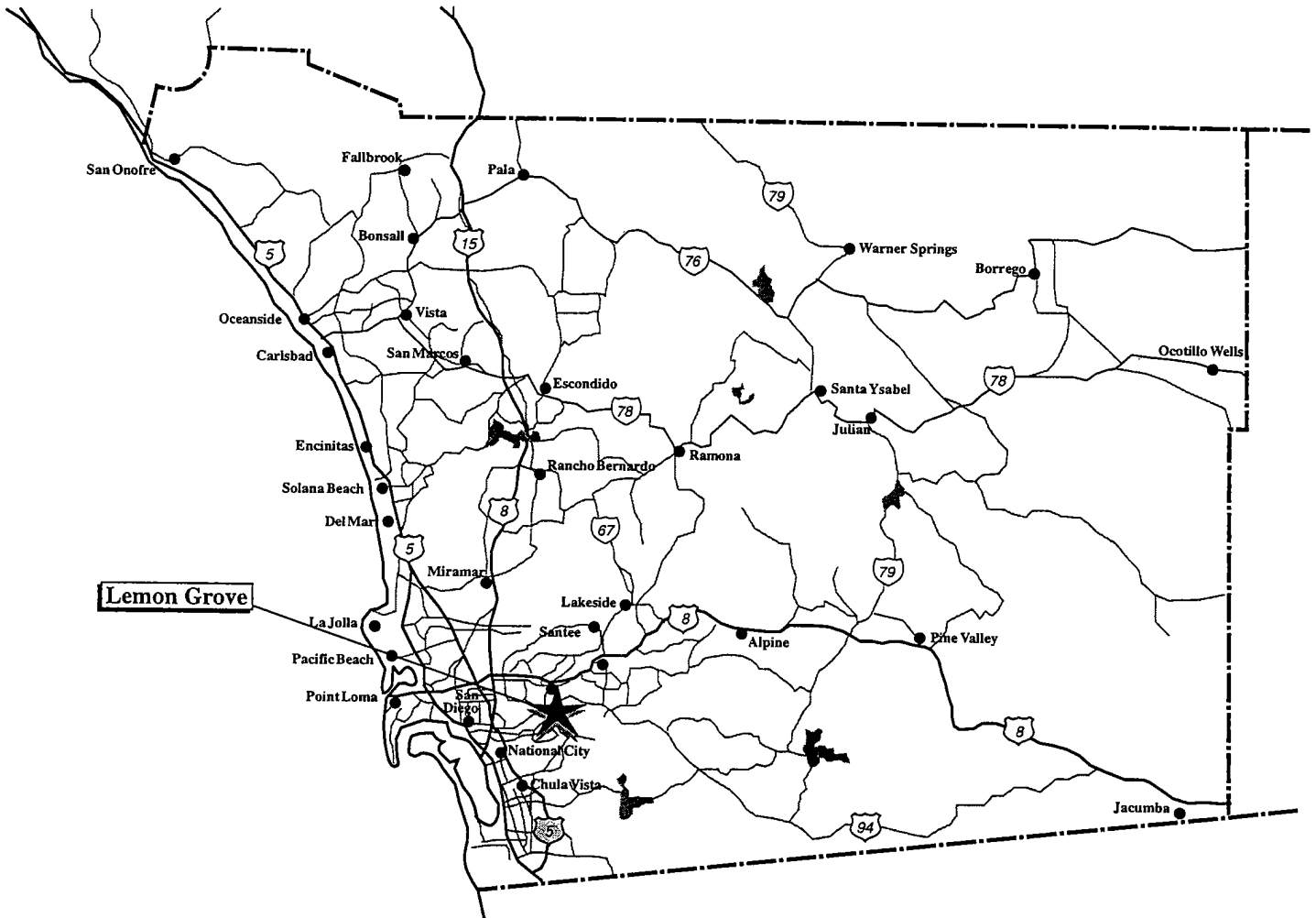
Varied environmental features distinguish the local landscape. Coastal mesas and drainages dominate, and elevations range from approximately 280 feet above sea level (ASL) in the northwestern part of the City to 528 feet ASL near the northeastern boundary. Several seasonal streams flow through the City during rain events, and the shallow groundwater table results in several natural springs. The City is primarily developed and little native vegetation remains. However, mature landscaping throughout the City provides a sense of history and permanence.

### Community History

The history of Lemon Grove dates back to 1869 when Robert Allison purchased a portion of Rancho Mission San Diego. A rail line was extended from San Diego to Lemon Grove in 1890, and the production



## General Plan



Not to Scale

**Figure I-1**  
**Regional Location**



# General Plan

## Legend

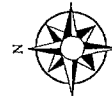
Lemon Grove City Boundary

Surrounding City Boundaries

MTDDB Trolley System

Trolley Station

Source: RUS



1 inch = 2,000 feet

Figure I-2  
City of Lemon Grove



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*"The history of Lemon Grove dates back to 1869..."*

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*"The little agricultural town prospered...due to the climate, beauty of orchards and homes, and enthusiastic public spirit."*

---

of citrus and berry crops boomed in the warm, temperate climate. The first subdivision occurred in 1892 and between 15 and 20 structures were constructed. The center of town was established along the rail tracks, and included a small depot, the first store which housed the post office, and a school.

After the turn of the century, more homes were constructed as new settlers arrived to enjoy the "Best Climate on Earth." The little agricultural town prospered and schools, churches and even a country club were constructed. In 1905, Lemon Grove earned the status of the "Pasadena of San Diego County" due to the climate, the beauty of orchards and homes, and enthusiastic public spirit. Homes with ten acres of citrus groves attracted affluent mid-westerners. Five citrus packing plants supported agricultural production and the population of Lemon Grove reached 500 by 1912.

During the 1920s, community pride grew stronger than ever. The town's monument - a 3,000-pound lemon - was crafted of wood and plaster in 1928. Constructed by Veteran of Foreign War volunteers, the lemon served as the centerpiece for a float in an agricultural parade. Throughout



*Rounding the curve on Cuyamaca Railroad, looking south towards downtown Lemon Grove, 1892. Courtesy of Lemon Grove Historical Society.*

the 1930s, home construction continued alongside citrus and garden vegetable crop production.

Residential development flourished during the 1940s, particularly after World War II. Citrus orchards slowly gave way to single-family neighborhoods. The boom lasted until about 1970 when the number of housing units numbered about 7,500, and the population reached about 20,000. During this period, business activity focused along Broadway, Federal Boulevard and Lemon Grove Avenue. By the mid-1970s, most of the vacant land in the City had been developed and the growth rate dropped off substantially. In 1977, the community incorporated as the City of Lemon Grove to gain local control over development and tax revenues.

### Current Conditions

The Lemon Grove of today is characterized by a well established land use pattern. The commercial and industrial areas primarily occur around Broadway in the northern part of the City, near State Route 94 (SR-94). The traditional downtown, located on Broadway east of Lemon Grove Avenue, provides additional shopping opportunities. Commercial activity continues to extend down Lemon Grove Avenue. The SR-94 freeway provides regional access, and the San Diego Trolley East Line runs parallel to Lemon Grove Avenue and intersects Broadway.

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*"Traditional  
downtown...  
commercial activity...  
well-established  
neighborhoods...  
municipal parks...  
schools and  
churches."*

---

The most recent estimate of the Lemon Grove population is 25,175 based on 1995 State Department of Finance population estimates. Well-established neighborhoods occupy most of the area south of Broadway. Single-family homes constructed in diverse architectural styles predominate in the neighborhoods. Condominium and apartment buildings also occur in some neighborhoods. Most multi-family residential development has been focused along major transportation routes, and within one or two blocks of Broadway. Several municipal parks provide recreational opportunities, and schools and churches are scattered throughout the neighborhoods.

The Lemon Grove monument - the famous 3,000-pound lemon - sits prominently in the town center, and recalls images of the community's early industrious spirit and agricultural roots. Moreover, a number of buildings from the old days still stand and provide a connection to the historic origins.

### Lemon Grove Speaks Out

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"...community  
participation in the  
planning process a  
priority."

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The City Council, when launching this General Plan update, made community participation in the planning process a priority. Since adoption of the City's first *General Plan* in 1980, aspirations for the City have evolved. The *General Plan* must represent the current desires of the local residents and business owners, and address the concerns that are most important to the community. Moreover, input from all groups in the community is imperative.

To obtain input from the community, the *General Plan* program included a substantial community participation. Public input served as the basis for the Vision for the Future and the related elements. A brief summary of the outreach programs follows below.



Lemon Grove Pioneers: William Lindsay, Ed Sonka and Leslie Schults, 1918. Courtesy of Lemon Grove Historical Society.



### **General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC)**

A 17-member citizens committee met nearly 20 times during the *General Plan* update, and served as an intermediary between the community at large and the General Plan project team. Input was provided at all of the critical stages of the planning process. The City Council, when appointing the committee, took all efforts to ensure that its demographic composition reflected that of the City.

### **Town Meetings**

Two Town Meetings contributed additional input from the community. The first Town Meeting was held at the beginning of the program to assess the community's ideas and concerns, and approximately 15 civic groups and organizations participated. The second Town Meeting focused on land use development alternatives and provided a forum for public comment.

### **General Plan Survey**

The City distributed a questionnaire to every home and business address to determine the community's goals and identify development issues. Residents and business owners returned a total of 947 surveys for a response rate of about ten percent.

### **Kids City Planning Program**

Because families are an important component of the community, the City requested input from the children. Several sessions were conducted with a local fifth-grade class to discuss cities and how to improve Lemon Grove. The program culminated in the production of the Kids Element, which was presented to the GPAC and the City Council.

### **General Plan Newsletter**

Three newsletters were distributed citywide at intervals throughout the General Plan update. In addition to describing the project progress, the newsletters announced upcoming Town Meetings and other opportunities for community input.

### Economic Development Task Force

The Economic Development Task Force-appointed to develop strategies to enhance vitality of the local business community - commented during the formulation of the General Plan objectives and policies and the land use plan. The input from the Task Force helped to ensure that the General Plan promotes sustainable business activity.

### Issue Papers

At critical junctures during the planning program, the following three Issue Papers were published: Issue Paper No. 1, "Planning Issues;" Issue Paper No. 2, "Vision, Objectives and Policies;" and Issue Paper No. 3, "Land Use and Circulation Alternatives." The Issue Papers facilitated a "building-block" approach to developing the *General Plan*, and allowed consideration of comprehensive goals before establishing implementation details. The GPAC and community at large provided considerable input on each Issue Paper.

The relationship of the community involvement programs and evolution of the *General Plan* is illustrated in Figure I-3.

### General Plan Organization

The *General Plan* is organized into seven chapters, or elements, each of which are preceded by a statement of the community's Vision for the Future. Each element is interrelated with the others, and together the elements establish guidelines to achieve the Vision. The elements include the:

- ◆ Community Development Element;
- ◆ Mobility Element;
- ◆ Public Facilities Element;
- ◆ Safety Element;
- ◆ Noise Element;
- ◆ Conservation and Recreation Element; and
- ◆ Housing Element

---

*"The General Plan is organized into seven chapters or elements."*

---

A standardized format is used throughout the elements. Following a brief introduction to each element, objectives and policies are presented. The plan to achieve the objectives and policies concludes each element. An *objective* is defined as a statement of a desired end. A *policy* is a rule or course of action that indicates how the objectives will be achieved.

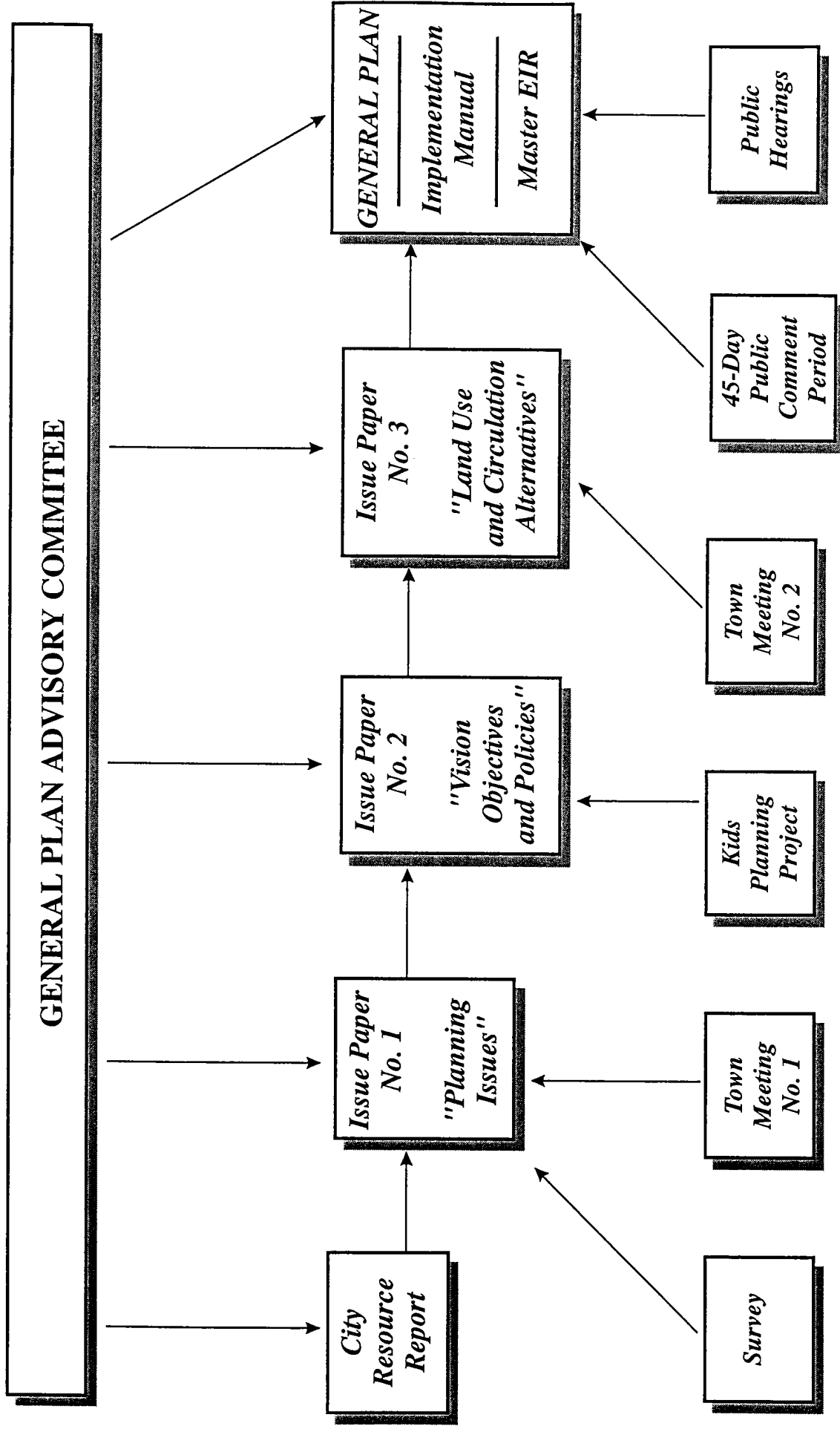


Figure I-3  
General Plan Program

Specific programs to implement the *General Plan* policies comprise the *General Plan Implementation Manual*, a separate document.

The Housing Element was recently revised in 1992, and State law does not require an update until 1997. The 1992 Housing Element is included in the updated *General Plan*, but the format of the element deviates from the format of the other elements.

### Related Documents

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"...City Resources Report, *General Plan Implementation Manual* and *Master EIR*."

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Three additional documents are directly related to the *General Plan*: *The City Resources Report*, *General Plan Implementation Manual* and *Master Environmental Impact Report (EIR)*. *City Resources* documents current environmental and development conditions. Based on the conclusions of this report, issues to address in the *General Plan* were identified. The *Implementation Manual* contains specific programs directly related to the *General Plan* elements. The programs will help the City to implement and achieve the *General Plan* Vision and policies.

The *Master EIR* analyzes the environmental impacts resulting from the implementation of the *General Plan*. Where environmental impacts are identified, the *Master EIR* requires mitigation measures to reduce the impacts. The mitigation measures correspond to individual programs contained in the *General Plan Implementation Manual*. This relationship will help the City to effectively implement the *Master EIR* mitigation measures and reduce the environmental impacts from *General Plan* implementation.

FPD

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

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Lemon Grove General Plan